

Holly Batchelor – 2221673

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## Module 2 - BMPF7005

*Critically evaluate a range of methodological approaches, research designs and research methods appropriate to gather data from complex work-based settings, with due consideration to research ethics and issues of insider research.*

### **Introduction:**

As I embark on my educational and research journey, I find the relationship between voice and mental health, specifically performance anxiety, fascinating. With over 15 years of experience as a professional vocalist and singing teacher, this topic holds special significance due to my struggles and interactions with students and fellow performers who have also faced similar challenges. In previous modules, having explored various research subjects and techniques, I came to find abundant research information and theories daunting. Crotty (1998) highlighted the disjointed sequence of procedures and approaches, many theoretical viewpoints, and inconsistent terminology, which can perplex even the most experienced researcher. Researchers' preconceived notions of truth, reality, and knowledge are influenced by their ontological positions and philosophical perspective (Crotty, 1998). These notions shape their thoughts, assumptions, and perceptions of society and the world (Schwandt, 2001). In social research, ontology is associated with selecting paradigms, the tools used to address specific research questions (Abbot, 2004). As strategies, paradigms reflect the beliefs and values of a particular field and guide researchers in solving challenges (Guba and Lincoln, 1994). Researchers can develop a practical research design by understanding the paradigms that align with their view of reality (Mills, Bonner, & Francis, 2006).

As a practitioner, I always strive to improve and provide the best experience for my students. If we keep improving our teaching methods, students will receive the best education we can provide (Hawthorne, 2022). Engaging in inquiry-led practice is crucial for establishing a strong methodological approach (Costley, Elliott and Gibbs, 2013). By utilising the created methodologies and techniques tailored to suit practitioner-led inquiry, one can enhance their abilities and significantly impact their field of work (Lester and Costley 2010). Lev Vygotsky's (1964) work emphasised the importance of social interactions in intelligence development, highlighting the significance of social situatedness in practitioner-led research.

This paper will explore various methods and strategies to understand the research process better. Involving my students in my work-based learning project will provide me with valuable insights into their needs and preferences, which will help me improve my teaching skills and create a better learning environment (Hannah Starkey, 2020). Ultimately, I aim to discover innovative approaches to benefit my students and enhance my teaching methodology. I must clarify my ontological viewpoint and determine the most appropriate paradigm for my workplace practice (Scott & Usher, 2004). This will assist me with the purpose of my research project and inform my methods, methodologies, data analysis, and design decisions (Mackenzie and Knipe, 2006). As a researcher, it is important to constantly examine our positionality and how our perspectives and identities may influence our work (Knoblauch, 2021). This ongoing self-awareness is crucial to maintaining research integrity and avoiding unconscious biases that could skew findings, as Basit (2013) and Hamdan (2010) highlighted.

### **Ontology, Epistemology and Axiology.**

Lincoln and Guba (1985) stated that understanding a paradigm involves considering four elements: epistemology, ontology, methodology, and axiology. These work together to create a foundation for research and analysis applicable to various fields (Kivunja and Kuyini, 2017). By exploring ontology, epistemology, and axiology, we can better understand these beliefs and how they relate to our research and help us take the following steps forward (Ajay, 2021).

The field of ontology involves studying and theorising about the characteristics of reality (Crotty, 1998). It encompasses a researcher's beliefs regarding what can be accurate and what we believe to be true (Bryman, 2008). The ontological assumptions outlined by Guba and Lincoln (1989) involve answering questions about what can be known and the nature of reality. Leaning towards a critical realist ontological perspective in my practice, breaking down complex concepts into smaller pieces is a great way for students to understand better voice pedagogy (Bergen, Wells and Owen, 2010). Engaging in thoughtful analysis and reflection with my students helps us better understand reality, develop critical thinking skills, and become more confident in our subject knowledge (Clark, MacIntyre and Cruickshank, 2007).

Epistemology is the study of our beliefs about the nature of knowledge and how we attain it (Richards, 2003). It explores the form and characteristics of knowledge, how we acquire it, and how we convey it to others (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005). Ontological beliefs play a big role within epistemology, as they can significantly impact how we approach knowledge and understanding (Annells, 1996). It is important to my practice that there is an understanding that everyone's experiences and perspectives shape their knowledge of the world. We must

consider factors such as language, gender, social class, race, and ethnicity when considering different viewpoints (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005).

The study of axiology pertains to what is valuable; it goes beyond practicality and asks us to consider what is valuable because it exists (Heron and Reason, 1997). When conducting research, it's important to remember that the goal is to answer a question that matters or has consequences (Farrow et al, 2020). By being mindful of our values, we can better understand how they may influence our research and take steps to minimise their impact, leading to more accurate and reliable findings (Li, 2016). Taking the time to assess the ethical implications of our research is crucial in ensuring that we are responsibly conducting ourselves and positively impacting society (Finnis, 2011).

After careful consideration of our beliefs, the foundations for our research project should now be set. Our next step is to identify the paradigm that best aligns with the goals of our project (Guba and Lincoln (1994b). Paradigms such as positivism, constructivism and pragmatism serve as the net that encompasses our ontological, epistemological, and methodological beliefs as researchers (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005).

### **Positivism**

Positivism is a philosophical perspective that emphasises objectivity and empirical evidence in research (Guba and Lincoln, 1994b). Ontologically, positivists view the world as external, with a specific reality that can be uncovered through research data and a reality that exists independently of our knowledge (Crotty 1998, and Carson, Coviello 1996). Epistemologically, positivists aim to detach themselves from the research process and focus solely on measuring variables and statistical significance, which ensures objectivity and accuracy in research findings (Trochim 2006). The predominant use of quantitative research methods is based on empirical evidence rather than subjective opinions or beliefs (Bogden and Biklen, 2003). Axiologically, positivism strongly emphasises objectivity, which can devalue individual subjective experiences and values, including those of research participants and researchers (Thomson, 2015).

The shift from positivism to post-positivism during the mid-twentieth century brought about a more flexible form (Crotty, 1998b). This approach acknowledges the limitations of positivism and highlights the importance of the researcher's impact on the data (Charmaz, 2006). The post-positivist view accepts that reality can be measured objectively, but they acknowledge that it is not easy to achieve (Trochim,2006). Post-positivism promotes a flexible approach and

uses quantitative and qualitative methods considering all findings to be valuable and contribute to knowledge development (Clark, 1998).

The positivist paradigm can be limiting as removing personal connections from research involving one's career and passion is tricky. I found it interesting that Denzin (2000) emphasised the importance of moral and personal investment in research, a concept many in the industry support (Roll, 2015). The positivist paradigm may be helpful when focusing on the scientific stance of the anatomy of the voice where one specific answer is sought (Callaghan, 2014). As my research project aims to reveal the multiple realities surrounding performance anxiety, the positive paradigm does not align with my goals as I am not looking for a single answer (Roll, 2016). Considering my role and the research subject, detaching myself from the subject as an insider researcher will be challenging. I believe that personal engagement is critical to conducting meaningful research within my practice, as Roll (2016) also suggests. I will also aim to use a mix of qualitative and quantitative data to provide a more comprehensive and accurate understanding of the subject matter.

### **Constructivism**

The constructivist or interpretivism ontological perspective acknowledges that reality is shaped by social interactions and personal perspectives (Guba, 2007). This viewpoint contrasts with positivists, as constructivists actively participate in research to amplify the voices of those whose experiences and perceptions, by using our minds, we make sense of the world (Fielding, 1997). Constructivists reject the idea of a single, objective reality and instead advocate for subjective exploration, favouring qualitative research methods (Creswell and Clark, 2007). Constructivists view learning as contextualised, with viability replacing certainty and Knowledge and actions are judged by their potential to provide workable solutions (Duffy, 2006). Qualitative research techniques such as observation and interviewing align with the constructivist approach and can explore the nuanced relationships in the teaching studio (Melton, 2007). This approach will help me gain insight into my students' perspectives and understanding, allowing me to find answers to their questions and emphasising the interaction between the teacher and student rather than prioritising (Vygotsky, 1978). This approach promotes the development of workplace professional practices while ensuring that the teacher continually checks for student understanding and incorporates their interests and ideas (Taber, 2009). The Active participation of vocal techniques within the voice studio can make the learning experience more enjoyable for students and encourages them to question and explore the world around them (Wetzel and Farrow, 2021).

### **Pragmatism**

Pragmatism is a philosophical movement that originated in the late 19th and early 20th century and emphasised the importance of learning through experience to adapt to our environment effectively (Ormerod, 2006). According to Dewey's (1925) assertion, positivism and subjectivism research paradigms aim to uncover multiple realities' objective or relative truth. In opposition to this, a pragmatic approach suggests that reaching the fact through a single scientific method is impossible (Meterns, 2003). They believe the reality of things is constantly changing and subject to negotiation (Feilzer, 2010). Unlike the other paradigms, pragmatism allows researchers to choose from various research methods and techniques, such as qualitative and quantitative data, based on what works best for their study (Creswell and Clark, 2007). Pragmatists believe there are no fundamental epistemological or ontological differences between quantitative and qualitative research methods, and they share many similarities (Hanson, 2008). The focus of pragmatism is on the study subject or problem, and all approaches employed are centred around it without being limited by philosophical or real-world constraints (Mackenzie and Knipe, 2006).

It is essential to understand that pragmatists do not automatically assume something is true just because it works (Tiles and Boisvert, 1998). Instead, they form their beliefs by concluding gained social habits and the recognition that knowledge is gained through experiences (Oles and Hirschheim, 2000). I found Dewey's explanation of pragmatism recognisable that developing habits through experiential learning is a great way to achieve dynamic coordination with our environment, which is essential for our growth. By creating a complex yet adaptable set of action habits, we can improve our ability to adapt to ever-changing surroundings (Ayres and Dewey, 1922). This applies within the voice teaching environment, where students learn and create the proper singing habits to build upon learning. Customising teaching techniques to fit each student's unique style and voice is essential for effective learning, as stated by Biesta in 2010. I have been incorporating these teaching practices in my work, but I need to understand their impact on development fully. The pragmatic paradigm has much potential for my project, and I am excited to explore it further using mixed-methods research.

### **Methodological Approaches**

A solid methodology involves determining the appropriate research design, methods, approaches, and procedures to gather and analyse data effectively (Jilcha Sileyew, 2020). The two main methodologies used in research are quantitative and qualitative (Macdonald and Headlam, 2008). Quantitative methods involve numbers and measurements, while qualitative involve interpretation and description (Hillebrand & Berg, 2000; Gorard, 2001).

### **Quantitative**

Quantitative research methods have been widely accepted due to their scientific and rational approach. Quantitative research involves gathering data using numerical measurements and then analysing that data using quantitative statistical analysis techniques. These methods allow researchers to draw conclusions and make predictions based on their collected data (Watson, 2015). Quantitative research can include Surveys, experiments with controlled variables, and observations are common data collection methods. In the field of voice pedagogy, the scientific approach of the positivist paradigm also relies on quantitative data to support findings (Bogden and Biklen, 2003).

### **Qualitative**

Qualitative research is any research that generates findings or conclusions that are not derived from statistical methods or other forms of quantification (Strauss and Corbin 1998). Qualitative research encompasses various approaches not limited to one methodology or discipline (Petty, Thomson and Stew, 2012). Therefore, it is crucial to carefully consider the research project's specific aims and objectives when selecting a qualitative methodology (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005a). In a qualitative research project, some valuable methods are open-ended interviews, observations, and literature reviews (Korstjens and Moser, 2017).

### **Action Research**

Action research varies from other research approaches in combining study and action simultaneously. It helps researchers to approach their practises in an orderly and seeking manner (Frabutt, Holter, & Nuzzi, 2008). Professor Kurt Lewin pioneered this approach in 1944, viewing the research process as cyclical, dynamic, and participative. According to Meyer (2000), the strength of action research is its emphasis on finding practical solutions to problems and its capacity to motivate initiatives for development. In educational contexts, it improves professional performance and pupil comprehension (Cochran-smith and Lytle, 2009).

An action research project on using singing for wellbeing the study found that teachers were eager to engage their students in music, but often felt self-conscious about singing themselves. To address this issue, the action research project implemented various strategies to help teachers connect with their students through music, reflect on their own backgrounds, and increase their confidence when teaching music. Unsurprisingly, confidence in music and the arts can be difficult to achieve, especially when faced with negativity from others. ("Examining the Instructional Design of Interactive and Collaborative Learning," 2019, Bainger, 2010).

Action research appeals to my role as a singing teacher, as reflection and development are a natural progression within my professional practice. To solve research difficulties, the cyclic process requires the researcher to look, think and act (Stringer, 2008). Look at the problem, think about collecting data, and then act on putting the data into action; employing this in my role will stimulate professional progress (Stringer, 2008). It also enables me to approach the topic as a researcher and a teacher.

### **Hermeneutics and Phenomenology**

Phenomenology is often characterised as investigating the fundamental nature of things, while hermeneutics focuses on the processes of interpretation (Teherani et al, 2015, Neubauer, Witkop and Varpio, 2019). Although there is a connection between the two fields, the relationship is quite intricate and fundamental differences cannot be overcome (Ricoeur, 2008). To comprehend social reality in phenomenology, one must consider the experiences of individuals (Gray, 2004). According to Van Manen (1997), phenomenology explores an individual's lived experience or world. It pays attention to how the world is perceived by a person rather than seeing the world as a separate entity from the individual. The emphasis of this inquiry is to uncover the meanings experienced in everyday life by asking questions such as, "What is this experience like?" Polkinghorne (1983) has described this approach as an attempt to understand the significance of human experience as it is lived. This is in connection with the constructivist paradigm and differs from positivism in that it does not aim for a single definitive answer. Instead, it focuses on understanding individuals' perspectives, beliefs, and experiences, allowing for qualitative data exploration. Phenomenological research provides insights into education by analysing individuals' lived experiences and the world around them. This approach helps social scientists gain a deeper understanding of people's issues and how to address them.

According to Kvale (1996), Hermeneutics is the study of human culture through text interpretation. Text can take a broad meaning of the written word and other forms of human expression such as art, theatre, music and dance. It is fascinating how much we can learn about a culture by analysing and interpreting its various forms of expression. By understanding the meaning behind a particular culture's art, music, and dance, we can gain a deeper appreciation and understanding of their values and beliefs. As someone who values the importance of understanding personal experiences, I find it interesting that researchers have widely used hermeneutic phenomenology to gain insight into the complexities of performance anxiety. By delving into the research behind this phenomenon, we can gain a deeper understanding of the factors that contribute to it and potentially find ways to alleviate the burden it places on those who experience it.

## **Bricolage**

Bricolage is a term used to describe when some internal researchers employ a mix of qualitative research methods to develop an effective plan (Costley, 2013). This method recognises that there are numerous approaches to performing high-quality qualitative research. Five types of research writing exhibit bricolage characteristics: theory, methodology, interpretation, political stances, and narratives (Denzin, 2011). A bricoleur researcher carefully adopts the best relevant approach accessible to boost their research which involves rigorously rethinking and redefining diverse research using multiple perspectives (1995, Kellner).

Bricolage provides the flexibility and variety I will seek in my project. The multidisciplinary aspect of the research I will undertake will require qualitative and quantitative data whilst allowing the research methodologies available to be considered and selected without restriction.

## **Sampling**

There are four main types of sampling methods: probability sampling, purposive sampling, convenience sampling, and mixed methods sampling (Teddle C and Yu F, 2007). Probability sampling is commonly used in quantitative research where units are randomly selected from the population. This helps to ensure equal representation and increase the accuracy of the sample (Blank, 2013). Purposive sampling, on the other hand, is a deliberate selection of settings, persons, or events that can provide important information unavailable through other means choices (Maxwell J, 2009). Convenience sampling is a useful non-probability method for qualitative research (Nikolopoulou, 2022b). While this method may offer convenience and cost-effectiveness, it's important to remember that it may only sometimes be the most dependable or representative way to gather data. We must evaluate the pros and cons of this method and determine if it aligns with the research question we are investigating (Ackoff, 1995). Mixed methods sampling is an approach that combines qualitative and quantitative techniques to provide diverse and comprehensive data sets for research. (Teddle and Yu, 2007).

I plan to conduct research focusing mainly on qualitative data where opinions and experiences are shared (Miles, M.B and Huberman, A M, 1994). To achieve this, I am considering utilising convenience sampling and mixed methods to match my budget and access to a small section of the population (Convenience sampling when and How to use it, 2021). I believe that this approach will allow me to be more flexible and gather personal experiences from my students instead of relying solely on numerical and quantitative approaches. Ensuring that the weaknesses and limitations of these methods are considered. Once a methodology has been selected, it will inform the methods to collect the data required.

## **Interviews**

Qualitative research interviews aim to understand the subject's perspective and experiences by focusing on the meaning behind them (Kvale, 1996a). Interviews, as described by Kvale in 1996 are a construction site for knowledge and involve an interchange between two individuals discussing a mutual interest (Sayrs, L, 1998). Interviews have a family of different types, such as structured, unstructured, and semi-structured (Gill P et al, 2008). In structured interviews, the questions are asked in a specific order, which can help to get a complete understanding of specific topics. Respondents are given various options when answering questions, making providing accurate and detailed information easier (Kallio et al, 2016). Semi-structured interviews have prearranged questions, but there is no restriction to the individual's answers and are said to be the the most used type of interview (Busetto, Wick and Gumbinger, C, 2020). Unstructured interviews involve engagement with the participant, with no predetermined questions or answer choices (Easwaramoorthy, Zarinpoush and Canada, no date). They are great for gaining insights and understanding perceptions (Brooks, 1996). Finding enough qualified participants willing to give up their time can be challenging. This can be a major hurdle, especially if you need to conduct many interviews. It's important to weigh the benefits of using interviews against the potential costs and challenges involved (Watkins, D C, 2012). Semi-structured interviews seem most appropriate to my professional practice because they allow some structure by creating a list of questions and allowing participants to expand on their personal experiences, adding value and insight (Naz, Gulab and Aslam, 2022).

## **Focus Groups**

Focus groups are a small-group interview approach that capitalises on participant communication to collect data (Kitzinger J, 1995). In action, a discussion is a strategy in which a researcher gathers a group of people to discuss a given issue, intending to uncover the members challenging personal experiences, beliefs, perceptions, and attitudes through mediated interaction (Kitzinger, 1994). Rather than asking individual questions, focus groups facilitate effective communication by asking questions, exchanging stories, and commenting on each other's experiences and viewpoints (Kitzinger, 1994). By uncovering people's knowledge and experiences, we can examine what they believe and how and why they believe what they believe. This method is a cost-effective and promising alternative, offering an effective platform for exploring contrasting paradigms (Guba and Lincoln, 1994).

## **Questionnaires**

Questionnaires are a great way to objectively gather insights about people's experiences, beliefs and behaviours (Oppenheim, 1992). Questionnaires can open and closed-ended questions. Closed-ended questions provide a multiple-choice answer method that is analysed using quantitative methods, which produce results that can be illustrated using tabulations and percentages. However, it can be frustrating for the participant as they are restricted and guided by their answer (Houtkoop-Steenstra, 2000). On the other hand, open-ended questionnaire questions align with qualitative methods. This involves collecting primary data through discussions and critical analyses, which do not include numbers and calculations and allow participants to express their opinions (Foddy, 1993). This flexibility can ensure that the researcher has covered all relevant issues thoroughly (McColl et al, 2001).

### **Insider Research**

Engaging in insider research means becoming a part of the research process and gaining a more comprehensive understanding of the subject matter. Conducting practitioner-led research can enhance knowledge and improve workplace practices (Costley, 2013). Insider research can also include individuals connected to a group, even if they are not official members (Hellawell, 2006). In the past, research was typically carried out by someone who needed to gain prior knowledge or connection to the research subject to maintain objectivity. However, insider research has been criticised for its potential lack of objectivity due to its close relationship with the research subjects.

As a singing teacher, I can relate to the relevance of the framework of insider research in our field. Vocal coaches and singing teachers are deeply involved in the practice of singing, making us prime examples of insider researchers. We need to understand the variation of our craft and constantly seek to improve our methods, and the framework of insider research can help guide us in that pursuit. Bonner and Tolhurst (2002) stated that there are many advantages to being an insider researcher. Including an understanding of participants' culture, familiarity with group members allows natural interaction and a stronger relationship with the group. These advantages can lead to more meaningful and insightful research findings.

Some potential problems with conducting insider research are the loss of objectivity due to the researcher's familiarity with the subject. This can result in unconscious biases and assumptions, undermining the research process's integrity. Researchers need to be aware of these risks and take steps to mitigate them to maintain the highest standards of objectivity (Delyser, 2001, Hewitt-Taylor, 2002). Ensuring that I am well-informed about the topic before conducting any research will ensure that I get the most out of the participants bearing in mind the restrictions of being an insider researcher (Shaffir, 1999)

## **Ethics**

It is important for researchers to follow certain principles to ensure their work is conducted ethically and with the best interests of all involved in mind (World medical association, 2013). According to the economic and social research council (ESRC), these principles include informing subjects fully about the aim, method to be used and where and how the research will be used, respecting the confidentiality and anonymity of participants, ensuring voluntary participation free from coercion, avoiding harm to participants, and maintaining independence and avoiding conflicts of interest or partiality (Our core principles, no date). Establishing clear ethical principles is crucial in educational research to ensure respect and dignity for all involved (Forbat and Henderson, 2003). Ethical guidelines must be followed to protect participants and guarantee ethicality; research ethics committees typically regulate standards and approve the research before it commences (Kottow m, 2008). Although there may be situations where deception is necessary, such as within the realist ontology to achieve a greater social good or truth, we must always be aware of the potential ethical challenges (Bok, 1978). When practising within the constructivist framework, it is important to be mindful of the potential ethical challenges that may arise due to the close personal interactions required by the methodology (Guba and Lincoln, 1989). Teachers can benefit greatly from using Dewey's naturalist meta-ethics to adapt to changing environments and make value judgments (Anderson, 2023).

## **Conclusion**

Studying philosophical perspectives has helped me understand my beliefs and values. Delving into ontological, epistemological, and axiological perspectives has given me a framework for considering how my thoughts fit into the bigger picture. Detailing and discovering one's research paradigm is essential because paradigms guide problem-solving and set the framework for any research project (Schwandt, 2007).

The constructivism and pragmatic paradigms are well-suited for research projects that rely on personal experience and perspective rather than scientific experimentation. These paradigms offer a wider range of research methods than the positivist approach, which is more rigid in its methodology (Charmaz, 2006). It's important to consider the benefits and limitations of different paradigms when researching to ensure that the method aligns with the research goals and objectives. Strict methodology usage can hinder a researcher (Felzier, 2010). It can limit creativity and the potential for new insights. I appreciate the pragmatic paradigm's focus on the research problem, rather than being limited to a specific methodology. This approach allows for exploring what works best for the research problem being investigated (Cotten, Tashakkori and Teddlie, 1999). However, the constructivist approach resonates more with me.

According to Honebein (1996), this paradigm asserts that individuals construct their understanding and knowledge of the world through their experiences and reflections on those experiences. It is an empowering approach that puts the learner at the centre of their educational journey, aligning with my professional practice and the sensitive subject matter. It is crucial to acknowledge that every individual has their own experience with performance anxiety, and there isn't a one-size-fits-all solution (Kenny, 2011). The environment someone is in can also contribute significantly to the development of performance anxiety, making it even more important to use a qualitative approach when studying this topic. No specific answer can be sought within this subject, so using a quantitative methodology would not be suitable (Brent and Leedy, 1990).

Discovering my paradigm allowed me to understand the best methodology and that using observations and interviews with open-ended questions would be a great way to gather the necessary data. I would also be able to utilise this to adhere to strict ethics, and an ethics proposal would need to be created before the research can be actioned. I feel better prepared to take on my research project with a better understanding of my worldview and the methodology and methods I will use to achieve my research goals.

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